

AMERICAN IBEX FOLKLORE

CHAD ARMENT

There are, naturally, far fewer reports of mystery ungulates in North America than alleged lake monsters, anomalous primates, strange carnivores, and the like. Generally, there are certain biological, behavioral, and biogeographical characteristics that make herbivorous mammals less likely to remain unknown, but as every cryptozoology enthusiast should know, some of the most interesting zoological discoveries around the world in the last few decades have been previously unidentified ungulates.

I have only run across a handful of mystery ungulates in the U.S., and most were reported in the 1800s and early 1900s. Some, like the “fan-tailed deer,” are likely cases of systematic confusion, as early hunters and trappers (and biologists) lumped or split species rather carelessly. A few others are less clear (e.g. Arment 2011). Presented here is one rather interesting case of a mystery animal that has a long ethnoknown history, but hasn’t been discussed much (if at all) in the cryptozoological literature.

Stories of an “American ibex” come from several regions in western North America. The true ibexes, genus *Capra*, are ruminants found in Europe, Asia, and parts of northeastern Africa. They are closely related to the domestic goat. Male ibexes are well-known for their prominent long backward-curving ridged horns. This is the one feature that is usually pointed to, by witnesses of alleged American ibexes, as evidence that they were seeing an animal distinct from our known native caprids.

In North America we have the mountain goat (*Oreamnos americanus*), the bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*), and the Dall sheep (*Ovis dalli*). We don't, however, have a recognized native species of ibex (*Capra*). Kurtén and Anderson (1980) noted that a partially mineralized caprid (classified as *Capra iowensis*) was discovered in an Iowa River sand bar, but it appears that this specimen has since been dismissed as a colonial-era feral domestic goat.

As long as there have been sightings, there have also been individuals (wildlife officers, biologists, hunters, etc.) pointing out the likelihood of misidentification. Particularly, they argue that younger male bighorns with incomplete horn curvature (or even old females) may present ibex-like appearances.

What follows is a chronological selection of historical passages from books and newspaper accounts noting cases of alleged ibexes and ibex misidentifications, first in Alaska, then from the Rocky Mountains (particularly from Idaho and Oregon), and finally from the southwestern states (Arizona and New Mexico).

ALASKA

“It is worthy of note that the Indians report another animal unknown to naturalists, on the higher mountains of the mainland. It is said to resemble the mountain sheep and to have horns nearly as long but almost straight, like those of an ibex. Lieut. Emmons is confident that these reports have a basis in fact.” (Dall 1895)

“In the window of the [Juneau] Post-office were displayed the horns and part of the frontal bone of the so-called Alaskan ibex, an animal affirmed by many to exist on the slopes of Mount St. Elias and the neighbouring mountains. I must say that, for my part, notwithstanding all the tales I have heard, I am very skeptical as to its existence, and the horns in question appeared to me to be suspiciously like



ALPINE IBEX (ARTUR TOMASZ KOMOROWSKI)



MALE BIGHORN SHEEP (BOB LOBLAW)



YOUNG BIGHORN SHEEP (JONATHAN ALLERS)



ROCKY MOUNTAIN GOAT (HENRYK SADURA)

those of the common or garden goat. The proprietor of the shop could give no precise account as to how, when, or where they were procured. All he knew was that the man he bought them from told him he had not shot them himself, but that he in turn had bought them from someone who assured him they had belonged to the veritable Alaskan ibex, and had come from the slopes of Mount St. Elias.

“These horns did not in the least resemble any ibex horns I have ever seen, either Indian, Caucasian, or Spanish; but might at first sight have been mistaken for a very small pair of markhor horns; the twist of the spiral was, however, inwards instead of outwards, which confirmed my suspicion, stated above, that they had originally adorned the head of a common domestic goat, and not a very big one at that. It seems unlikely that such a species should exist in Alaska, separated by nearly half the circumference of the globe from the rest of his relations; but, of course, when one remembers the case of the American wapiti (*Cervus canadensis*) and the Altai wapiti (*Cervus eustephanus*), one must not take it for granted that a species cannot exist in a given locality, merely because many thousands of leagues of land and water intervene between it and the *habitat* of its nearest allied congeners.” (Cane 1903)

“I feel some diffidence in approaching the following subject, but since most sportsmen who have visited the western coast of Alaska have probably heard similar yarns, I will quote a few statements which I gathered in regard to the fabled ibex of Alaska.

“It is a popular theory amongst many prospectors and others who have been far into the mountains of the interior that an animal exists there which is neither a sheep nor a mountain goat. I had long talks on several occasions with one of the oldest and most trustworthy residents, who has lived for many years in the head of Cook’s Inlet. He declared

to me that he had seen some horns brought out by natives from the mountains some miles inland which were like the horns of the *Ovis dalli* ewe, but were more than twice the length of the sheep's horns and also larger. He said he imagined they belonged to some kind of ibex.

"Mr. J. Folstad, the owner of the schooner *Alice*, in which we sailed along the coast of the Alaska Peninsula, who was a Norwegian engineer, and had travelled over a great part of the interior of Alaska, makes the following statement.

"During the first great rushes to Dawson in 1897 and 1898 he was in the town of Dawson. There he saw, hanging outside a store (the owner of which sold meat such as moose, sheep, etc.), two animals with long horns which were unknown to him. On inquiry at the store he was told that numbers of people had been to look at the animals, and no one knew what to call them. But a sporting English doctor in the town, hearing of the episode, had been to examine them, and pronounced the beasts to be undoubtedly ibex. The only part of this story which I cannot understand is why this doctor did not obtain the horns of these beasts, and why the sporting world heard no account of his discovery.

"On board the ss. *Bertha*, going down to Seattle in November 1903, we heard that there were two prospectors on board who had seen specimens of the fabled ibex. Mr. Vander Byl and I went to interview these men. They both described the animals as being darker than sheep, with shaggy hair underneath the throat and belly, horns brown in colour and curving backwards, about 30 inches long. One man claimed to have seen three or four dead ones killed by prospectors, and he said he had seen them in the mountains, sometimes in company with sheep, but that they were not so numerous as the sheep. We produced some photos of dead ibex killed in the Altai Mountains, and asked if he had ever seen a similar animal. He at once replied, 'Why, that is the same beast, I guess.' He declared these animals

could be seen near the head-waters of a tributary on the east side of the Copper River.

“I may mention that early in 1904 two sub-species of wild goat from British Columbia and Montana were described by Dr. J. A. Allen, but these, of course, have nothing to do with the reputed ibex.

“Now the only explanation of the riddle appears to me to be this. Either there is some animal in Alaska as yet unknown to naturalists and sportsmen, or these animals are descendants of domestic goats which have escaped from old Russian or native settlements in former times. The latter theory is, I think, borne out by the so-called Mount St. Elias ibex. Colonel Cane, in his book *Summer and Fall in Western Alaska*, mentions a pair of horns which may be seen in the Post Office at Juneau, and are called the horns of a Mount St. Elias ibex. It is claimed that the animal was killed on the slopes of Mount St. Elias. I have seen and examined these horns, and entirely agree with Colonel Cane's remark that ‘they might at first sight have been taken for a very small pair of markhor horns; the twist of the spiral was, however, inwards instead of outwards.’

“On mature consideration, these horns certainly appear to have belonged to some form of a domestic goat, although I cannot say that I have actually seen any goat with a head closely resembling the one in question.

“Doubtless some enterprising sportsman will ere long make an expedition up into the Copper River country, where there is also reported to be a particularly savage species of brown bear called locally the ‘bald-faced bear.’

“I have heard tales of these bears lying in wait for men on the trails, and killing them without being previously wounded.

“Any one who listens to half the yarns regarding big game in Alaska is likely to be led many merry dances on a fool's errand, but the stories regarding the ibex come from so many different parts of the country, and are all so very

similar, that it leads one to believe that there really must be some 'fire' behind the smoke." (Radclyffe 1904)

"Readers of *Recreation* know that the world has frequently been startled by reports of the discovery, in various places in the West, of an ibex. We found one near one of our camps, among the high tops. That is, we found what many a man would have called an ibex, without making a thorough investigation. Here is a picture of him. However, on close examination he proved to be simply 2 sprouts that had grown up from the root of a fallen tree and died and shed their leaves. It happened that the root of the tree had been burned and a remaining bit of charcoal formed what appeared to be the animal's right eye. A piece of another sprout that had been broken off furnished a good imitation of an ear, and, viewed through the brush, the outfit looked very like a real ibex.

"Many a so-called hunter would have plunked a bullet at such an apparition, and then have gone to camp and told the boys how he had shot at an ibex, and hit it between the eyes, but that when he went up to it, it proved to be only a root of an old tree. There are other hunters who would have plunked a bullet 4 feet to one side of it, or over it, or under it, and would still have told the other fellows how they hit it between the eyes. I know certain tenderfeet who would have fled from so formidable a looking beast, at sight, and rushed into camp wildly excited and told the boys between gasps, how they had seen an ibex, and that it dashed into the brush and escaped before they could get a shot at it.

"This picture shows about as good a specimen of the real ibex as has probably ever been found on this continent; yet a well known British Columbia sportsman told me 2 months ago that he firmly believed there were plenty of ibexes in a certain remote part of Alaska at that time. He said he had been assured of this fact by men who had seen them and whose word he could not doubt. I asked him how he accounted for the fact that though while men and Indians had

hunted in Alaska a hundred years, not a single head or skin of an ibex had ever been brought out? He shook his head, but said he still thought there must be living specimens of this animal up there.” (Shields 1904)

“Many an old-timer in Alaska will tell the visitor that a species of ibex different from both sheep and goat inhabits the territory. When such stories are sincere they undoubtedly refer to young goats or to either the young or the female of the white sheep, for no true ibex is native to any part of North America.” (Osgood 1909)

Huge Lituya Bay Goat Believed to Be Ibex

Juneau, Alaska, *Daily Alaska Dispatch*, February 17, 1918

Does the ibex—the long unaccounted for parents of all the goats of the North American continent—have its home, along with so many other mysteries, in the Alaskan wilds? Does the Lituya Bay district, within a short distance of the capital city of the Territory, have the distinction of sheltering the herds of these mysteriously disappeared progenitors of the goat race in this half of the Northern Hemisphere?

All dependable evidence would indicate that such is the case and that for the scientist whose delight is the ferreting out of such problems, a new occasion of pleasure is still in store.

For the men who have seen and hunted this strange animal, do not pretend to be learned in the lore of the naturalist, but they do maintain that the great goat which they have frequently encountered in the Lituya Bay region is not an ordinary goat by any means, and that it does fit the descriptions of the rare ibex.

There is a well-accepted theory among naturalists that four Alaskan islands, Admiralty, Krupeanoff, Kodiak and

Graham, supplied the grizzly bear population for the entire Rocky mountain range of North America. From the brown bear stock on these islands the bruin lords of the Rockies are believed to have descended.

It is not altogether beyond belief that, as one particular variety of ibex, found in Asia Minor, is supposed to be the parents of the domestic goats of the Old World, the Lituya Bay mammal tribe provided the goat population for the New World.

Several varieties of ibex, or chamois, are found in Europe and Asia. The Pyrenees, Alps, Altai, Himalayas and Caucasus mountains have scanty herds of them, differing mainly in the form of horns. All, however, have long recurved horns, transversely ridged in front.

The Alpine ibex, called the bouquetin, is the best known, although it is now rare except where protected.

E. Doyle of Lituya Bay is one of the numerous hunters and woodsmen who have noted the strange species of goat which is believed to be the ibex. Robert Barclay, who has killed many of them, supports his contentions that the animal in question has marked characteristics differentiating it from the common mountain goat.

The female of the Lituya Bay ibex have four teats or dugs, whereas the mountain goat has but two. The horns have a tendency to curve around more like those of a mountain sheep, while the true goat has shorter horns. The fleece or mohair from these ibex is extremely long, fine, and silky. It is much finer than that of the goat, finer even than the mohair taken from a domesticated angora goat. This fleece is so heavy that a bullet from a high power rifle has been known to lodge only a short distance under the skin, the cushion formed by the heavy fleece having stopped the force of the bullet.

In weight they are from thirty to forty per cent heavier than the goat, animals dressing five hundred pounds being frequently taken. They are browsers the same as the goat,

and while they do not exist in countless numbers, they may often be seen on the hill sides above timber line in herds of a dozen or two. When the heavy snow storms of winter set in, they are forced down, sometimes even to the ocean beach.

The enormous size of these animals has been widely commented upon. Some men describe them as being "as big as camels." Like the European chamois, they are impressive looking creatures, far exceeding in stature and build any ordinary wild mountain goat.

So far as known, they are to be found only from Laprue Glacier westward to the Alsek river, and inland for less than a hundred miles.

Other reports from the Yukon district just back of this section, lends further support to belief in the existence of the ibex in Alaska.

And fifty miles toward the Lituya Bay section from White Horse is a stream called Ibex river.

[While the author was hunting Dall sheep:] "While still within range of a long shot, they stopped and looked back, as if wondering why the leader did not follow. Then they ran upward in a series of jumps for a hundred feet and stopped again. This method of ascending was continued until they reached the crest, when again I had before me that wonderful sight of the mountain ram walking on the sky-line. I had noticed particularly their attitudes. The large one seemed to be all elasticity. His head was held straight up, his neck swelled out, his back straight, his legs rigid. He reminded me of a strutting cock. Thus appears the mountain ram under excitement. But I made an interesting discovery. The other ram was three or four years old and his horns curving behind did not curl upward. When he reached the skyline and came under a certain angle with the sun, I beheld the famous 'ibex' often reported to have

been seen on the far northern summits of Alaska. The horns appeared to be magnified to a long sweep of three or four feet, curving behind exactly like those of an ibex. So complete was the deception, that had I not been certain of the animal, I would have been deluded into the belief that an ibex stood before me. I have many times witnessed similar delusions and have thus learned to give more credit to the good faith of those who report having seen an ibex. Also, I know that they have not been so fortunate as to have had experiences similar to my own.” (Sheldon 1919)

“Next day it continued raining, so the [story] contest was resumed, lasting all that day and far into the night. Shorty told of once capturing a goat alive in Alaska, and said they were so tame and plentiful that it would be no trick at all to repeat the performance on this trip. Cap said he had seen the rabbits so thick in that country that they ate off all the vegetation—in fact, these rabbits were so numerous that finally they had no feed whatever, so they ate themselves. Billy Wooden told of killing an ibex in Alaska, describing it as a counterpart of the goat except that the front feet were large and the horns were twisted, containing ridges that ran in spiral fashion around the horn, as in some of the European species.

“I was curiously interested in the ibex story, especially as I had heard from other sources of these animals having existed there. One man who vouches for their presence at one time in Alaska is ex-Representative James Wickersham, of Fairbanks, with whom I conversed on the subject.

“However, Judge Wickersham, I believe, received his impressions more from what he read in Gen. T. A. Allen’s book, ‘Government Report on the Copper River (Alaska) Exploring Expedition of 1886,’ than from any personal experience that he has had with the supposed animals. I

have a copy of General Allen's book, and publish herewith an extract from it covering the subject, as follows:

“Whether the big-horn mountain sheep, *ovis canadensis*, exists in Alaska I am unable to say, but I desire to add also a new geographical race of the same. The animal in question is called by the natives tebay, and this name I leave unchanged until a specimen will have been carried out of the territory. We killed several of these animals, one of which, a ram, had horns twenty inches long and nearly straight. Their structure was similar to that of the bighorn, but the curvature was very slight. This ram was killed on a very high point, such a place as is usually sought by them, and in its fall was sadly mangled. The head of the tebay is much like that of a Southdown sheep, the muzzle much less pointed than in Nelson's big-horn. The hair is of a uniform white—in fact, nearly equal to his snow surroundings in color, and is nearly as easily broken as that of the antelope. Next to the skin is a very fine, short wool, which is very strong. In size the tebay is probably an equal of its relative, the bighorn. I saw a spoon made from the horn of one that measured twenty-six inches in length and five inches across the bowl. We were informed that some had much larger horns than the one that furnished material for this spoon. This, like most statements of natives, is questionable. The large ram and one other were killed on the most northerly tributary of the Chittistone River. The natives informed us that small tebay could be killed a few miles below the junction of the Chittistone, a fact we doubted, and hence chose to allow them the use of our carbines. They passed the night on the mountains north of the Chitina River, and returned with four small ones that would weigh when dressed probably sixty-five pounds. The heads were left on the mountains, but the bodies brought in seemed identical with those obtained on the Chittistone River. Why only small ones should be found at this place in the latter part of April I

cannot say; yet the mountains here were not so high as farther to the east, where the large ones had been killed. The last of these animals seen or heard of by us were near the headwaters of Copper River, on the divide between it and the Tanana River.'

"At this late day, of course it seems odd to read of a doubt cast at the habitat of the *ovis canadensis*, as shown herein by General Allen, but when one reflects that his book was written about thirty-five years ago, it is not amazing. It is amusing to note the two very distinct animals described respectively by Billy Wooden and General Allen. Billy Wooden's animal of mystery was distinctly a goat, except for the horn and front hoof formation, while General Allen's was a sheep. There could, of course, be no connection between the two forms, according to the descriptions given. Naturally, when we hear of such reports, the first thing that enters our mind is that no hunter has ever been able to secure and preserve one of the skins, and secondly, that none of these specimens has ever reached any of the many natural history institutes of our country that would be so very anxious to secure them at a substantial cost. I believe I can solve the Allen myth by suggesting that it might be a young mountain sheep ram or an old female, with slightly curved horns. But Billy Wooden's ibex has simply got my 'goat,' for I cannot fathom it. Rumors of ibexes having been seen in the States are very old. Other unnatural forms of wild life have also been reported, but when run down they have usually turned out to be about as authentic as the stories of the philaloo bird and the side-hill gouger." (McGuire 1921)

See Ibex in Alaska

Freeport, Illinois, *Journal-Standard*, September 10, 1924

Tanana, Alaska.—A species of ibex—identical with the Old World ibex—has been sighted by hunters in the Noatak River region. This wild country abounds in both sheep and

mountain goats, but the hunters insist that they have discovered the true ibex.

“On the other side of the Bering Strait, the Eskimos of Alaska also have legends, myths, and rituals concerning the animal of the snows. In pictures etched on walrus ivory, one can see strange quadrupeds with long horns and short, stocky legs, which look like ibex when their ‘horns’ point backward, or reindeer when they point forward. But there are no ibex in Alaska, and these figures, which some ethnologists consider mythical goatlike animals, are probably firsthand renderings of mammoths, based on the shape of the animal’s body, deformed by ice.” (Cohen 2002)

ROCKY MOUNTAINS

Owyhee, Idaho, *Avalanche*, June 17, 1893

Frank Leply saw four ibex on a bluff of rocks above Louse creek one day this week. He is familiar with these animals, having killed numbers of them on Burnt river, Oregon, and says he could not have been mistaken; but to make sure of it he sh—got one of them. These are the first of these, apparently a connecting link between mountain sheep and goats, we have ever heard of in Owyhee.—*Nugget*.

“Is There an Ibex in this Country?

“For 20 years past I have been hearing rumors and reading newspaper accounts of the appearance of so-called ibex in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington or British Columbia. I have always regarded these stories as pipe dreams and have run down several of them. In each case where it had been claimed that the ibex had been killed the specimen

proved on examination either a female mountain sheep or a white goat.

“The region in which it is claimed the ibex has been found has been worked over by fur traders and trappers for 200 years, and if there were such an animal there some one of those trappers, or some sportsman or naturalist, would surely have taken a specimen and it would have found its way into some museum.

“Here is a letter that reads more like fact, more like the report of a careful observer, than any ibex story that has ever come to my notice:

“Tacoma, Wash., Nov. 12, 1901.

“In May, 1900, I was staying in the Crow’s Nest pass, Canadian Rockies. One evening while going along the railroad track 2 animals came down from the mountain side to the track. They would have weighed about 160 to 180 pounds each. The color was ashy gray. The hair on the back was about 6 inches long and stood up, forming a black line from the back of the head to the tail. The under side was a little lighter color. Legs were of medium length. The horns were about 3 feet long, beautifully black, curved back and a little outward. I was within 15 yards of them and had a good



look at them. I believe they were ibex. I send you a drawing of the head of one, made while looking at them. I hunted for them a week or so after that, but never saw them again.

"A rancher in Alberta told me that in old times when he lived in Oregon he saw several of these animals, which he called antelope. He recognized the drawing instantly as of the same animal.

"John F. Almon.

"Could these have been the descendants of some domestic goats that were liberated years ago? Or is there really a species of ibex indigenous to the Northwest? Who can tell?—Editor." (Shields 1902)

"Legendary Distribution.

"The writer has carefully traced out the legends regarding the occurrence of goat in Colorado, Utah, and California. There are persistent stories about the existence of white goat in Colorado, which, when investigated seem to have their origin in some domestic goat which are known to have escaped from captivity. It is, however, a certainty that *Oreamnos* has not existed in Colorado since the arrival of the white man, and there is no proof of its previous existence there. This statement is made after a full examination of the evidence.

"The purpose of this paper has been to gather and summarize the known facts about this interesting animal and it has been necessary to discard a large amount of data contained in the literature of the subject. Statements by certain writers regarding the existence of the goat in Wyoming, Colorado, California, and even New Mexico, are extremely misleading. It is positively known that no goat have ever existed on Mt. Shasta, although this mountain has been a favorite locality for stories about mountain goat and the mythical ibex. The origin of these fables is easily traced to the former existence on Mt. Shasta of mountain sheep, the

horns and bones of which are still occasionally found there. The straight horns of the mountain sheep ewe are probably responsible for most of these legends. It is bad enough to suggest the occurrence of goat on Mt. Shasta, but it is utterly absurd to assert their existence on Mt. Whitney, 300 miles farther south, and it is still worse to include in the range of the goat New Mexico or the barren coast mountains of southern California.

“The above examples will suffice to show the loose manner in which this subject has been treated by writers who have not sifted the evidence sufficiently.

“Within the United States the mountain goat is only found in Idaho, western Montana, Washington, and Oregon. There is no evidence whatever of the white goat having existed in Wyoming. In examining the rumors respecting the occurrence of goat one must remember that only a few years ago very little was known about this animal, and few people had seen it. In the south, escaped domestic goat and old mountain sheep ewes with bleached coats and straight horns, have probably been the basis of many such stories. In some places such animals have been mistaken for white goat and elsewhere, notably in Alaska, for the legendary ibex. Until the discovery and description of Dall’s white sheep, in 1884, all white animals in the north were called goat and white mountain sheep meat is sold to-day in Dawson City restaurants under that name.” (Grant 1904)

Ibex in Oregon

Boise, Idaho, *Idaho Statesman*, August 15, 1908

Baker City, Ore., Aug. 14.—Deputy Game Warden W. R. Parker of this city, accompanied by a party of hunters has just returned from Main Eagle, northeast of Baker, where they killed three ibex. This is something extraordinary for, according to reports, there are few ibex in the United States and they never have been seen outside of eastern Oregon

and Idaho. The game warden was well pleased with the game and it has attracted an unlimited amount of attention here.

Save Ibex His Aim

Portland, Oregon, *Oregonian*, November 22, 1909

Advocating that the State of Oregon or the Federal Government should surround Mount Eagle in the Cornucopia Range with a game preserve that the only herd of ibex known to exist on the American continent may be saved, is one of the purposes of the present visit to Portland by W. R. Parker, of Baker City.

Mr. Parker astonished big game hunters a few years ago when he announced that he had found a bunch of the rare animals in an almost inaccessible part of Mount Eagle. Having been engaged in hunting the big game of Eastern Oregon for many years and possessing superior knowledge of the state's mountains, his statement was not openly scouted, but there were many throughout the country who wanted proof of the existence of the ibex. In company with two brothers, Mr. Parker returned to the mountains and killed a buck, doe and fawn. He brought them out and had them mounted, as well as photographed before removing the hides.

Known as "Bill" Parker among the crack shots and hunters of the state, he recounts many stories of his hunting days, and is always surrounded by a group of attentive listeners when he reaches the Hotel Perkins, his headquarters. Last night he said:

"We went in to the Cornucopia Mountains in 1906 after a bunch of bear, having been in the habit of following that sport every Spring. We first located three of the animals, but later my brother found about 26 in all. The ibex have been unmolested, so far as we know, since the Fall of that year, when I killed the specimens referred to for scientific purposes. We have always refused to guide hunters to their

feeding grounds, although we acted as guides for many years.

“That country is now filling up with settlers, and in my opinion it will be only a short time until somebody runs on to the haunts of the little bunch of ibex, the only herd known to exist in America. It would seem advisable that some protection should be accorded them, and we stand ready to give the proper officials all the information we have gathered. If it is not done they will probably disappear, as have the mountain sheep in some parts of the mountains.”

Mr. Parker is an expert with a revolver, rifle or shotgun, one of his favorite tricks being the breaking of marbles with rifle or pistol bullets as they are thrown in the air. He shoots the automatic guns and carries several beautifully engraved with his name and address and a number of hunting scenes.

“An American Ibex

“Idaho enjoys the proud distinction perhaps of being the only state in the Union that has found it necessary to enact a law protecting ibex. Not that there is or ever was one of these animals in the state, but some time back in the past a legislator opined there was and got his opinions enacted into law. Each succeeding legislature has preserved the tradition and solemnly re-enacted the law. So it stands today, a monument to the game preservative zeal of the state. The hunter is solemnly warned, under severe pains and penalties, that should he encounter an ibex making a meal off the cobblestones of some lofty mountain peak, he is to stay his lethal arm and permit the animal to go frisking away unscathed. The fact that no animal of the genus *Capra* is native to the New World seems never to have found lodgment in the brains of our law makers; to them the ibex is an actual fact.

“The above law is mentioned for the guidance of visiting sportsmen whom the writer wishes to have enjoy their sojourn among our mountains and streams unmolested by the attentions of the game warden. The sportsman is warned not to interfere with the peace and prosperity of our ibex; Idaho has seen fit to go into the ibex business and we object to having our supply killed off. Of course, the possibility of your ever encountering one of these animals is about nothing to infinity, but it is as well for you to be warned beforehand.

“The writer encountered this strange statute several years ago when serving a sentence in the legislature, and when the Fish and Game Committee reported its bill was somewhat surprised to find the clause occupying a prominent place in the measure. He humbly asked the assembled solons if any of them had ever killed an ibex in Idaho, or if they knew of any person who had been so fortunate. The inquiry disclosed the fact that no one present had ever killed the animal, nor could any lawmaker at that moment remember a man who had done so, but inasmuch as it was written into law that ibex should be held sacred it stood to reason that some person had been guilty of the felony and it was just as well to awe that fellow and others like him with the majesty of the law against a repetition of the offense.

“It required several years of diligent search to trace the origin for the belief that ibex frequented our state. Like many similar mistakes in natural history, the matter had its origin in ignorance of what constitutes a species, or rather a genus of a species.

“About twenty-five years ago some hunters brought into the city of Boise from somewhere in the Salmon River mountains the skin of a goat which differed materially from the ordinary Rocky Mountain White Goat (*Oreamnus montanus*) (sic). At least people who saw the skin said it differed, and after due debate it was decided that the animal

must be an ibex. The animal was white, somewhat taller and more slender in form than the ordinary goat, the horns were much longer, having both a backward and lateral curve, the points flattened instead of sharp, and it did not possess the hump of the mountain goat. These were the principal distinctive marks and upon these a classification was made.

“Other hunters reported similar goats in various parts of the state, generally from the higher ranges. These kept together in small bands and were exceedingly wary. As the years went on these ibex (?) became scarcer until, like the buffalo, only a few remained. Then came the wise legislator and insisted that the law’s restraining hand should be laid upon people bent on destroying our ibex herd.

“While not particularly relevant to the subject, the writer is constrained to relate an anecdote which will serve to illustrate how easy it might be for persons not trained in anatomical matters to mistake a simple type variation of a genus for an entirely new genus. He strayed into Withers Brothers in the city of Spokane, Wash., and was confronted by a beautifully mounted head upon the wall. At first glance the head appeared to be that of an African antelope, the next glance and it appeared to be a white-tail deer head with the horns of a goat.

“‘What sort of monstrosity is that?’ he asked.

“‘That,’ Jack Withers replied, ‘is an Australian Koodoo, probably the only head of its kind on exhibition in the United States.’

“Jack made the mistake of getting his koodoo in the wrong country or his hoax might have ‘stuck.’

“A close inspection failed to disclose the identity of the animal and the writer was compelled to call for help.

“‘What in blazes is that, Jack?’ Jack laughed. ‘You are about the only man that has looked at that head who has not been satisfied with my explanation, and some of them have offered me big sums for the rarity. To tell you the

exact truth, that is a white-tailed doe scalp with a pair of domestic goat horns fitted to it.'

"Dr. Hornaday, who has examined the so-called ibex of Idaho is of the opinion that it is nothing but *Oreamnus* with minor type variations. He found similar characteristics existing in the goats of the Kootenia mountain region in British Columbia, and elsewhere along the Pacific coast in the northwest. Other careful zoologists have agreed that the animal is not a *Capra* nor does it belong to the subfamily *Caprinae* but to the subfamily *Rupicaprinae* or short-horned goats." (Anonymous 1912)

Protecting the Ibex

Oakland, California, *Tribune*, December 18, 1912

Idaho enjoys the proud distinction perhaps of being the only state in the Union that has found it necessary to enact a law protecting Ibex. Not that there is or ever was one of these animals in the state, but some time back in the past a legislator opined there was and got his opinions enacted into law. Each succeeding legislature has preserved the tradition and solemnly re-enacted the law. So it stands today, a monument to the game preservative zeal of the state. The hunter is solemnly warned, under severe pains and penalties, that should he encounter an ibex making a meal off the cobblestones of some lofty mountain peak he is to stay his lethal arm and permit the animal to go frisking away unscathed. The fact that no animal of genus *capra* is native to the New World seems never to have found lodgment in the brains of our law makers, to them the ibex is an actual fact.

It required several years of diligent search to trace the origin for the belief that ibex frequented our state. Like many similar mistakes in natural history, the matter had its origin in ignorance of what constitutes a species, or rather a genus of species.

About 25 years ago some hunters brought into the city of Boise from some where in the Salmon River mountains, the skin of a goat which differed materially from the ordinary Rocky Mountain white goat (*Oreamnus montanus*). At least, people who saw the skin said it differed, and, after due debate it was decided that the animal must be an ibex. The animal was white, somewhat taller and more slender in form than the ordinary goat, the horns were much longer, having both a backward and lateral curve, the points flattened instead of sharp, and it did not possess the hump of the mountain goat. These were the principal distinctive marks, and upon these a classification was made.

Other hunters reported similar goats in various parts of the state, generally from the higher ranges. These kept together in small bands, and were exceedingly wary. As the years went on these ibex (?) became scarcer, until, like the buffalo, only a few remained. Then came the wise legislator and insisted that the law's restraining hand should be laid upon people bent on destroying our ibex herd —*Outing*

Idaho Hunter Kills Ibex

Boise, Idaho, *Idaho Statesman*, October 1, 1913

Salmon, Ida.—An ibex was killed last week by Lee Ramey on the basaltic crags between Singiser and Rabbitfoot. This is the first ibex known to have been taken in that part of Lemhi county. There is a difference of opinion among authorities as to the existence of ibex in Idaho, and a writer in an eastern magazine recently made sport of Idaho legislators for including the ibex in the list of game animals in this state. Last winter a small band of six ibex was stalked near Boyle creek, in this county, and one of the animals was shot by the hunter, who did not know what he had.

District Forester Grandjean Hoots at Ibex Story

Boise, Idaho, *Idaho Statesman*, October 3, 1913

District Forester Grandjean takes exception to a recent news item from Salmon stating that Ibex had been killed in that vicinity. He maintains that the ibex family has no representatives on the American continent, being found only in Europe, Asia, and Africa. He has often noticed statements in the state press to the effect that Ibex have been found within the confined of the state of Idaho, but these assertions have never been proven by producing the remains of any such animal.

Several years ago when a statement appeared that ibex had been discovered in this state near the headwaters of the Salmon river and in the Sawtooth and Salmon river mountains Mr. Grandjean took this matter up with the Smithsonian Institute, and the institute informed him that they often received specimens for identification which the senders claimed to be ibex, but that in all instances the animals had proven to be of the Rocky Mountain goat or the Rocky Mountain sheep family.

How Errors Are Made

"That a large animal like the ibex could exist, even in the most remote part of Idaho without ever being identified or without the horns or head of such an animal ever being submitted to the proper authorities, seems highly improbable," said Mr. Grandjean. "People who are not well posted on the animal life of this country are apt to get the impression when viewing a female mountain sheep or a band of yearling rams that they have discovered some strange animal."

Chance to Earn \$500

Mr. Grandjean says that several years ago he made an offer of \$500 to the party who would bring in any specimen

of the ibex family which had been found in this state. Several hunters at that time claimed to have a specimen but no one ever produced any proof or claimed the reward. He says this offer has been withdrawn, but feels sure that a substantial reward from the Smithsonian Institute awaits the hunters who will furnish proof that a specimen of the ibex family, in its wild stage, has been found in North America.

“The Irrepressible American ‘Ibex’

“Throughout the Rocky Mountain region from El Paso to Dawson City belief in the existence of an undiscovered American Ibex springs eternal in the human mind. Again and again has the creature been seen and reported, with positiveness and particularity. From the State of Washington, one man sent a very good drawing of its head and horns, and from Colorado came a photograph, an admirable description, and measurements, of a specimen which had actually been shot and mounted. Two really distinguished sportsmen of our acquaintance were with some difficulty convinced that a journey in pursuit of the horned mystery would be a waste of time.

“The spirit of investigation which prompts the pursuit of a mysterious animal, is highly commendable.

“Without it the scientific world would lose much. At the same time, it is unfortunate that all Rocky Mountain hunters can not know that there really is not the faintest probability of the discovery in America of any living representative of the genus *Capra*, and that it is useless to pursue the phantom ‘Ibex’ of the West.

“The specimen shot in Colorado, and submitted to us, was a domestic goat, presumably of Spanish breed, that had escaped from captivity and become wild and self-supporting. Such animals account for some of the ‘ibexes’ that have been observed. A pair of horns and a pelt recently sent to



ROCKY MOUNTAIN SHEEP HORNS.

us by Dr. D. T. MacDougal, from the Desert Botanical Laboratory at Tucson, Arizona, illustrate another source of honest belief in the existence of an American Ibex. Dr. MacDougal, who is himself a keen naturalist, had no difficulty in naming at sight the species which these specimens represent, but he kindly elected to afford us another practical demonstration of an 'Ibex' story reduced to its lowest terms. The animal shot as an 'Ibex' in the Santa Catalina Mountains of Arizona proves to be a big-horn mountain sheep, female (*Ovis canadensis*), about four years old. As in all horns of female mountain sheep, these describe only a quarter of a circle, and in their lack of curvature they are slightly goat-like.

"Beyond doubt, the many 'Ibex' stories and queries that have so frequently arisen during the past fifteen years, originated in honestly made but wholly erroneous observations of domestic goats running wild, of mountain sheep ewes, whose horns are short and rather straight, and of young mountain sheep rams.

“In this connection, it may also be noted that in many instances female white mountain sheep seen at a distance have been mistakenly identified as mountain goats.” (Hornaday 1915)

“The Rocky Mountain Goat, or White Goat, is the only American representative of the numerous species of wild goats, ibexes and other goat-like animals so numerous throughout the Old World from Japan to India, southern Europe and northern Africa. Thus far with but one exception all the rumors of ‘ibex’ that have come from Wyoming, Colorado, Montana and British Columbia have proven entirely without foundation. In one case a Colorado hunter discovered a small band of once-tame goats running wild and reported it to *Recreation* magazine, with a photograph of a mounted specimen. While it is possible that a genuine *Capra* may yet be found inhabiting some unexplored region, like the Romanzoff Mountains, such an occurrence is very improbable.” (Hornaday 1919)

Idaho Seeks Famed Ibex

Portland, Oregon, *Oregonian*, October 29, 1919

Boise, Idaho, Oct. 28.—(Special.)—The state fish and game department is seeking the famed ibex in Idaho, now almost extinct. Reports coming to that department indicate the animals are to be found in mountain fastnesses. Otto M. Jones, state game warden, has decided to investigate. He has gone into central Idaho on that mission and will have to follow trails over which few human beings have passed in order to reach the supposed hunting ground of this animal.

This animal is supposed to be found only in the Asiatic mountains. It is very similar in appearance to a mountain

goat. The game warden will also investigate sheep ranges to determine if the sheep are interfering with the deer.

Idaho "Ibex" Just Mountain Sheep; Jones Discovers

Boise, Idaho, *Idaho Statesman*, November 8, 1919

The next Idaho rancher, sheep man or hunter who kills an "ibex" will face a fine of \$100 and costs, ruled Otto M. Jones, state game warden, Friday.

"There ain't no such animal," the warden declared after reviewing his two weeks' search in the middle fork country of the Salmon river hunting for clews and examining alleged specimens. "The ibex was never found in Idaho."

Two alleged samples of the animal were viewed by the warden on his hunt and both were found to be ewe mountain sheep, a forbidden animal to the hunter. Their short slightly curved horns and a suggestion of corrugations upon them had misled the hunters.

The game warden found that residents of the middle fork country had mistaken mountain sheep for ibex many times, particularly when young bucks were found with horns not yet grown into the characteristic sweeping curve and ewes with similar head dress.

Sometimes the animals had been called "chamois" and sometimes had been set down for an entirely new breed of mountain animal.

The warden, who pressed into the mountains to such distances that he was in great danger of being snowbound, who froze part of one foot in his expedition and who battled for a week to get back to civilization, convinced himself by the trip that all the ever-recurring ibex rumors are false.

The next hunter who thinks he has found a new animal, an ibex or a chamois, he said, is bound to find instead, should he kill the animal, a justice and a stiff fine. Ibex hunters will hunt at their own peril.

Idaho Protects Ibex

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, *Press*, February 6, 1920

The state game warden in Idaho warned the ranchers that hereafter the slaying of an ibex would mean \$100 fine with costs. Now an ibex, outside of the ninth page of the nursery alphabet book, was an alien animal in those parts, so with the keenest zest every one who owned a gun hastened out to find such a creature. Several sample ibices were bagged and put on view, only to be pronounced mountain sheep, which, before their horns were grown, the more cultured Idahoans prefer to call chamois. But bent upon an ibex, for purposes of comparison, the warden pressed far into the mountains in his quest. He just escaped being permanently snowbound, froze a foot and battled with the storms for a week to get back to civilization, where arrived, he announced that all ibex rumors are false, and that any one who thinks he has shot one had better conceal it.

Woods and Waters, by Pierre Pulling

Pocatello, Idaho, *State Journal*, September 21, 1952

This column in the past has referred to the Nevada ibex myth. There is an "Ibex Pass" near the California-Nevada boundary, and I have talked to several Nevada mountaineers who claimed to have seen herds of ibex. Nevada had a law protecting the ibex years ago. The true ibex is a European goat, and nearly extinct.

There is no proof as to what these fellows saw, or how sober they were when they saw them. Further, elective bodies can pass anything, like the club man who was elected cuspidor, and proud of it. I think they saw bighorn ewes.

Milt Williams (1977) of Idaho Fish and Game suggested that early reports of ibex in Idaho were the mistaken identity of bighorn sheep ewes and their "relatively thin, slightly

curved horns.” He did note that in a booklet by Adelaide Hawes (*The Valley of Tall Grass*), she noted an 1883 newspaper article telling of “a group on a pleasure trip into the mountains of Owyhee County having killed forty-five deer, seven antelope and three ibex.”

SOUTHWEST

Syracuse, New York, *Daily Standard*, August 12, 1895

An ibex was killed in the Superstition mountains, Maricopa county, Ariz., recently. It is said that only two others of these animals have ever been killed in the United States. They were found in Oregon.

Ibex at Willow Creek

Tucson, Arizona, *Daily Citizen*, August 13, 1913

Prescott, Ariz., Aug. 12—Residents of Willow Creek report seeing an ibex near that point. This rare animal has rarely been known in Arizona. It has been reported on an average of twice a week. There is a \$500 fine imposed by the state game law for killing the ibex.

Ibex Reported in Arizona, but Experts are Skeptical

Tipton, Indiana, *Tribune*, April 4, 1935

Phoenix, Ariz., April 4.—Reports that a herd of 100 ibex inhabit the mountains near Kingman have been made to the biological survey at Albuquerque, N. M., by Mohave county officials.

Although representatives of the biological survey declared the reports “impossible,” they have agreed to send a field man to the Kingman district to see the strange animals. Ibex are usually found in Asia.

The reports were said to have been filed by J. W. Faulkner, superior court judge, and Sheriff Ernest Graham, who insisted the animals were neither antelope nor mountain sheep.

Boulder Dam Ibex Believed Roosevelt Herd Offspring

Phoenix, Arizona, *Independent Republic*, April 4, 1935

Kingman, Apr. 3.—(AP)—A herd of ibex, whose progenitors are said to have been placed in Nevada by the late President Theodore Roosevelt nearly 25 years ago, is ranging in the Big Bend country above and below Boulder dam.

Elmo Bollinger, Mohave county attorney, and Sheriff Ernest Graham, as well as numerous citizens of this area, aver they have seen the animals, a variety of wild mountain goats, found usually in Asia and Africa.

“While traveling with Sheriff Graham in the mountains I saw six ibex in one group and shortly afterward four more,” Bollinger said. “I understand their progenitors were a gift to President Roosevelt and he had them sent to Nevada and the Grand Canyon area.”

Engineer Saw Ibex

H. L. Lyon, resident engineer on the Boulder dam road, also reported seeing them.

Government officials, expressing skepticism over the existence of the ibex, have ordered a field man here to examine the animals.

Al Jagerson, service station operator at Willow beach, stated having seen them many times. He estimates 150 in the herd.

“I have seen them swim back and forth across the Colorado river below Boulder dam,” he declared. “There have been as many as 40 in one day browsing under the shade trees during the summer near the river adjacent to Willow Reach.”

Larger than Goats

No one here seems to remember how many of the animals were released by the former president, noted for his big-game hunting.

Bollinger asserted they have all the characteristics of the ibex. "They are different from the mountain sheep and goats of this section," he added. "They are larger and more powerful than the goats; and have the uniform color of their species, various degrees of brown, usually lighter on the throat, stomach and between the legs than elsewhere."

E. B. Morrison of Kingman, familiar with the habits of the ibex, said the Boulder dam region affords them natural surrounding.

He pointed to the cold winters and the fact the ibex remain upon the crags as near as possible to the snow line, descending the mountains to find uncovered pasturage.

Big Herd Seen

"They usually go about in small bands," Bollinger said, "but sometimes gather into a herd of 100 or more."

"Scores of citizens, in Kingman and vicinity have seen these animals during the last 10 years or more and we believe they are ibex," he concluded.

From Washington came word however that biological survey officials were equally certain the purported ibex were only "mountain sheep."

Scientists also said they "could not have been ibex because that animal is not native to America."

Wild Ibex Reported in Big Bend

Lockhart, Texas, *Post-Register*, May 30, 1935

A herd of wild ibex, a species of mountain goat usually found only in Asia and Africa, has been reported ranging in the Big Bend country.

Numerous citizens of that area insist they have seen the animals though game authorities are openly skeptical.

The theory advanced is that they are descendants of a herd of ibex placed 25 years ago in a game preserve in Nevada by President Theodore Roosevelt.

So-Called Ibex Seen in Arizona May Be a Cross-Breed Species

Oshkosh, Wisconsin, *Daily Northwestern*, July 4, 1935

Flagstaff, Ariz.—(U.P.)—Fastnesses of the little-explored and almost inaccessible Sycamore canyon northwest of here may harbor a species of ibex, hitherto unknown outside Africa, reports reaching here indicated.

Hunting parties, on trips into the wild country, have sighted strange animals, unlike anything known to be native to this section of the United States, they reported.

In each instance, they described the animals' horns as exactly like those of ibex they had seen in zoos or in the trophy collection of Warren P. Lawson, Arizona rancher, who has hunted big game on four continents.

Interest in the strange animals was raised to the point recently that federal authorities were notified and were understood to be sending biological survey experts into the region to attempt to identify the animals.

Lawson, however, said he believed the so-called "ibex" may be the result of strange interbreeding between domestic sheep and mountain goats. He pointed to the fanciful colors of the wool from sheep raised by Navajo tribesmen in support of his contention. The Navajo's sheep, he said, had been inbred and crossbred with goats for so long that strange hybrids were produced.

The rancher-big-game hunter demanded that the state game department protect the "ibex." Interest in them was so great since their discovery, he said, that it was likely hunters would exterminate them.

Mountain Sheep Charges Dropped on Quaint Plea

Reno, Nevada, *Evening Gazette*, April 12, 1938

Oatman, Ariz., April 12 (AP)—Court records revealed today that a jury believed sufficiently in the presence of ibex, a species of old world goat, in Mohave county that three men accused of killing mountain sheep were acquitted.

The jury said the state did not prove conclusively the animals were not ibex, although two deputy state game wardens and a University of Arizona professor testified there was no such animal in Arizona.

Former President Theodore Roosevelt reportedly sent half a dozen ibex to the vicinity of Boulder dam. The U. S. biological survey, however, has never found any record of the ibex being released in the United States.

One defense witness, Jerry Hoffman, who said he had been a miner and prospector in the area between Kingman and Boulder dam thirty years, testified he had seen one hundred of the strange looking animals.

Have You Got Any Ibexes You Want Seen?

Albuquerque, New Mexico, *Journal*, May 10, 1938

Flagstaff, Ariz., May 9 (AP)—An Arizona ibex is worth \$100.

Such a reward was offered by T. E. McCullough, president of the Arizona Game Protective Association, to anyone who could locate a live, uncaged ibex in the state.

There has been much controversy over the existence of ibex in Mohave County.

Several men in Mohave County charged with killing mountain sheep were released when they claimed the animal slain was an ibex, descendant of a herd released in Northern Arizona by Theodore Roosevelt about 1900.

“Whatisit” Mystery Bobs Up Again
in Alamogordo Area; May Start Search

Gallup, New Mexico, *Independent*, February 28, 1940

Alamogordo, Feb. 28 (AP)—A 40-year-old argument over the “whatisit” of the San Andreas mountains has cropped up again—this time with demands for an expedition to hunt one of the strange animals.

“It’s an ibex,” declare the ranchers in the little known mountains that lie between two southern New Mexico deserts—the White Sands and Jornada del Muerto—journey of death.

Scoffs State Game Warden Elliott Barker:

“There are no ibex on the American continent; probably a mountain sheep.”

“But,” swear the old time stockmen, “this animal isn’t a mountain sheep or a mountain goat. It has hair, not wool, and straight horns.”

The argument has been going that way ever since the late Bob Burck killed a strange animal in the upper reaches of the San Andreas. The old timers insist it resembled pictures of an ibex and that experts at the New Mexico Agricultural College so identified it.

Conclusive proof of the story, they maintain, is “Ibex corral” so called because Burck nailed up the head there.

A year or more ago, the game department sent an expert into the San Andreas and found nothing—the ranchers say he spent only a few hours and didn’t reach the “whatisit’s” range.

To the proposal of an expedition into the inaccessible heights, Warden Barker has been adamant, warning them, the ranchers say, that if a “whatisit” were bagged and it turned out to be a protected animal, the hunter would be prosecuted.

M. C. Cauthen, head of the Otero County Game Protective Association, entered the negotiations recently in an effort to bring the two factions together. Frank Andregg,

one of the San Andreas ranchers, added an offer to guide a “whatisit” hunt without charge.

THE ROOSEVELT INTRODUCTION THEORY

One of the interesting aspects of cryptozoology is that because all mystery animals are folkloric (whether or not they exist in actual fact, or are undescribed or unrecognized species), there is a tendency to attract other folkloric elements. In extreme cases, this leads to mystical elements (i.e., paranormalism) being attached consciously or unconsciously by witnesses or investigators. But, here we have another layer of folklore, the authoritarian origin story. There are stories all across North America of wildlife officers furtively reintroducing predators (eastern cougar, coyotes, rattlesnakes) in order to control prey populations. “Somebody” saw them do it, so it must be true. (This isn’t just North American; similar stories are found in Europe, and not that long ago we saw folklore coming from the Middle East about “strange animals” alleged to be released by the U.S. military to attack livestock.) The idea that Theodore Roosevelt released ibex into the southwest is clearly folkloric, and as of yet, I’ve seen no evidence that it is true. It probably spread because it sounds like the sort of thing that conservationist Roosevelt might have attempted. One journalist (Halloran 1970) suggested that the Roosevelt story was based on chamois that were promised to Roosevelt by the Swiss government to release in Yellowstone, but didn’t arrive until Roosevelt was out of office, at which point they were just turned over to the National Zoo. In this case, the story is more innocuous than “predator release” tales, but the narrative is very similar.

IBEXES IN NORTH AMERICA TODAY

While there may not be a native species of American ibex, we now have free-roaming introduced ibexes in New Mexico. Introductions began in the 1960s, as part of a state program to release captive-born offspring of several ungulates for big game hunting. A brief summary of the more significant ungulate activities:

- 1950: New Mexico begins introducing exotic ungulates, first with 52 aouda into Canadian River Canyon (Murphy 1969).
- 1964: New Mexico placed Iranian ibex, Siberian ibex, and gemsbok (*Oryx*) in the Red Rock (Grant County) state-operated game pastures (Murphy 1969). Once the animals multiplied, offspring would be released into the wild.
- 1969: *Oryx* were released into the White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico (Anon. 1970).
- 1970: New Mexico Game and Fish released 15 Iranian ibex into the Florida Mountains of southwest New Mexico (Anon. 1970).
- 1973: By 1973, there were an estimated 40-50 Iranian ibex in the Florida Mountains, and an additional 10 were introduced to the herd (Anon. 1973). Another six were added later in the year (Anon. 1973b).
- 1975: New Mexico held their first ibex hunt, allowing four hunters to acquire permits (Anon. 1975).
- 1975: New Mexico had to nix its plan to introduce Siberian ibex onto federally-owned Ladron Mountain when the Bureau of Land Management refused to allow it, citing new changes in the National Environmental Policy Act (Anon. 1975b).
- 1976: New Mexico began transferring the sixty-some Siberian ibex from their Red Rock facility to Canadian River Canyon (Archibald 1976). This introduction apparently failed (Mungall 2007), dying out in the 1980s (Trennel 2010), though there may be occasional rare sightings.
- 1977: Outdoor editor Bill Quimby (1977) noted that wanderers from the New Mexico exotic introductions are occasionally reported from the Arizona side of the border, but weren't at that time taking root.
- 1985: An aerial survey of Iranian ibex in the Florida Mountains counted 695 in three hours time (Taylor 1985).

Today, several species (and hybrids) of ibex can also be found roaming private game ranches in various southwestern states. Escapes do happen, though game officers react quickly, so as to make certain exotics won't spread diseases or outcompete native species.

CONCLUSION

Obviously, misidentifications are the likely explanation for most, if not all, alleged American ibex sightings. Certainly, sighting reports should always be treated cautiously. Striving for the best evidence possible requires physical material for examination and testing. If I were to suggest any location as a possible starting point for further research, it would be in Alaska. After all, if there were a species of ibex living in the mountainous areas of southern Alaska, it is possible that an Alaskan hunter may already have possession of a skull and horns, and not recognize its scientific significance (not an uncommon occurrence when it comes to undescribed species). This direction might be worth some effort.

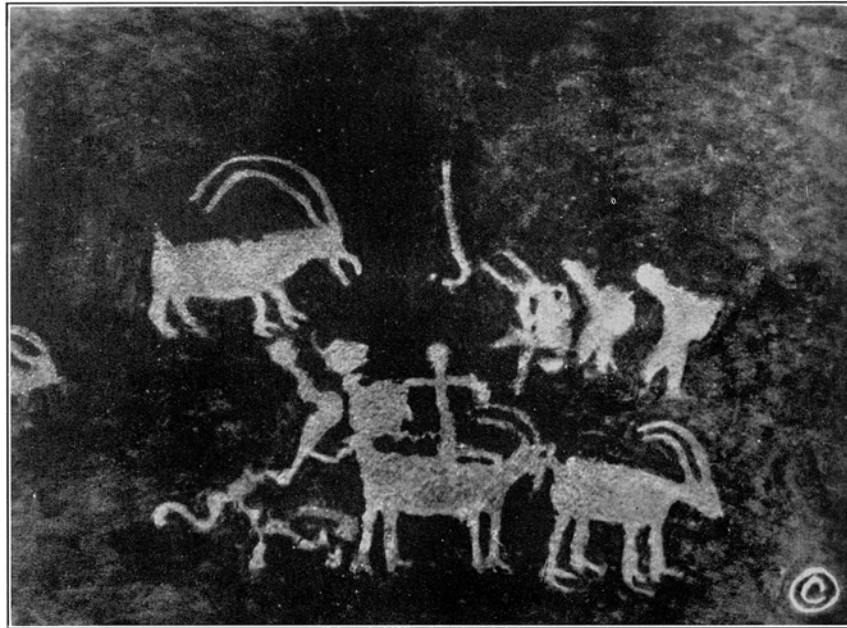
The obvious rejoinder is, why bother investigating at all? Isn't this a clear open-and-shut case of mistaken identity? Interestingly enough, there is one further bit of circumstantial evidence: ibex-like representations from a number of Native American petroglyphs.

In one series of petroglyphs in Havu Supai, archaeologists discovered the outlines of what are clearly ibex-like figures. The horns appear too straight (while recurved) and long to be obviously representative of mountain goats or bighorn sheep. Similar petroglyphs are found elsewhere in various western states. There is more than one possible explanation, of course:

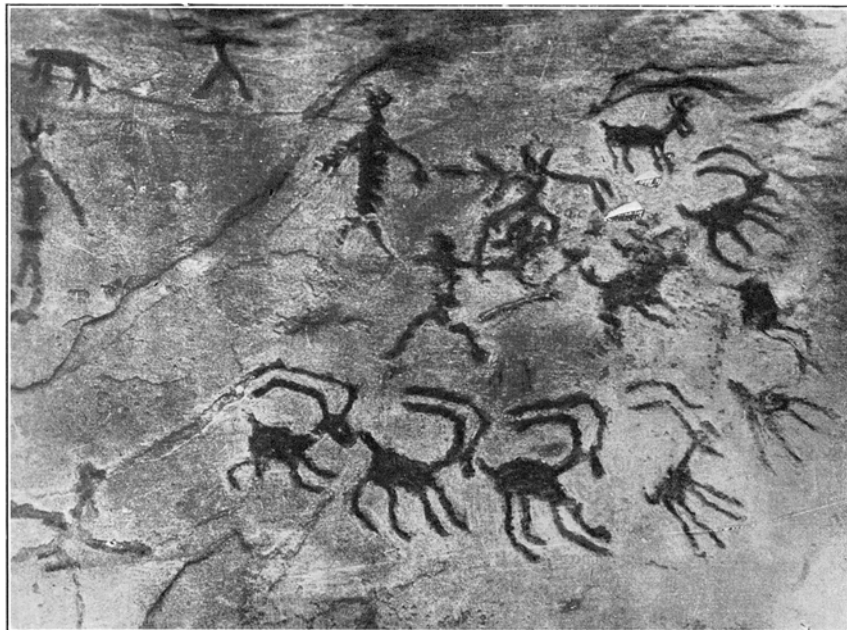
- 1) The representations are exaggerated, poorly carved, or show unrealistic perspectives, and actually represent recognized species (likely bighorn sheep).

- 2) The carvers identified bighorn sheep with aberrant horns as separate from the typical form, and carving them distinctively.

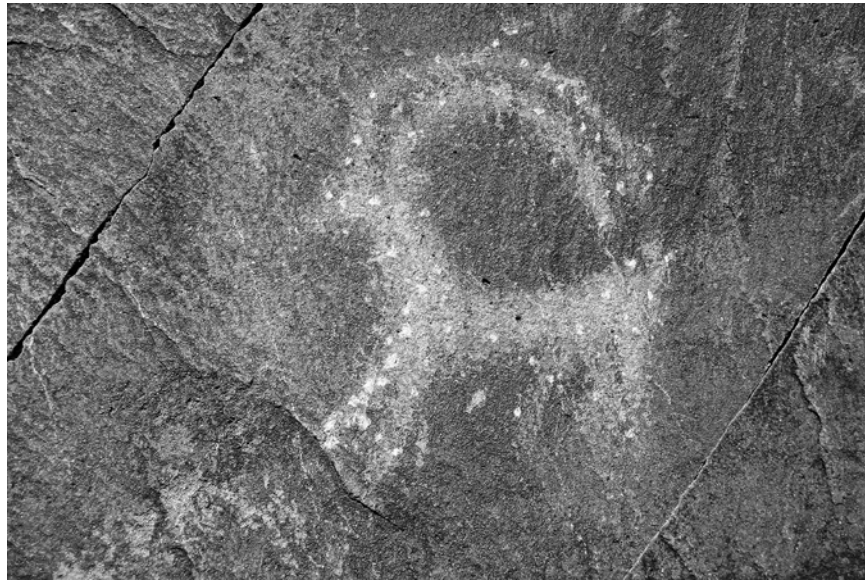
- 3) The carvings do in fact represent a true American ibex, which may or may not still exist.



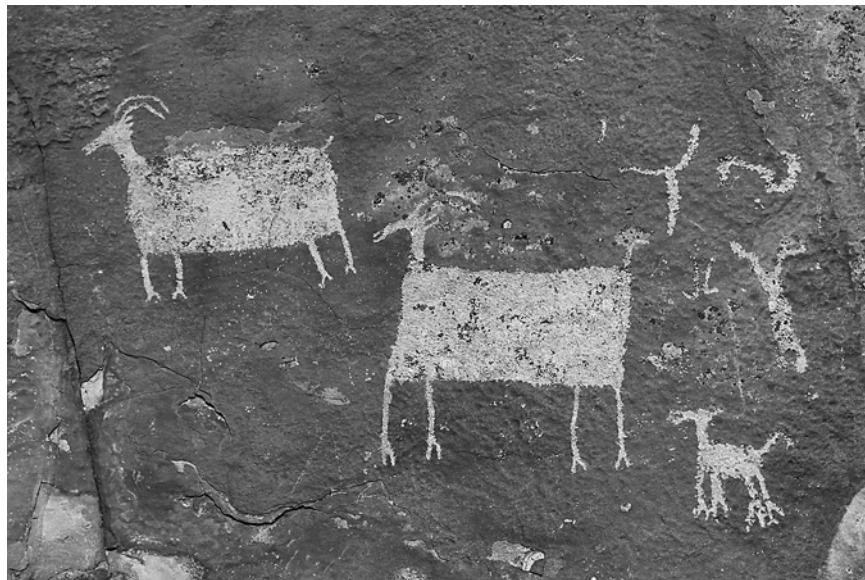
HAVA SUPAI CANYON, ARIZONA (HUBBARD 1925)



LEE CANYON, ARIZONA (HUBBARD 1925)



AN ACTUAL IBEX PETROGLYPH, KAZAKHSTAN (DENIS SUKHOV)



PETROGLYPHS OF ROCKY MOUNTAIN GOATS,
NEAR IRVINS, UTAH (CURTIS BATES)



BIGHORN SHEEP PETROGLYPHS,
WANAPUM RECREATIONAL AREA, WASHINGTON
(EUGENE KALENKOVICH)



A UTAH PETROGLYPH (RALF BROSKVAR)



VALLEY OF FIRE STATE PARK, NEVADA (VLADISLAV GURFINKEL)

At this point, there is no fossil evidence that ibex crossed the Bering Strait, though a number of other ungulates did. Unless confirmative physical evidence is ever brought forward, questions regarding the American ibex's true identity will remain ambiguous at best.

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